
The Indian National Congress

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THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

By Rev. R. A. Hume, D.D., of Ahmednagar, India

I have been asked to write a statement about the Indian National Congress, an interesting and, on the whole, a creditable political institution of Modern India. There are many reasons why India has never been and has not yet become a nation, but it is on the way to become such. India is a small continent half as large as the United States, with different races, different languages, different religions, and different civilizations. It has never all been under one ruler. Those who came nearest to becoming general rulers over the widest extent of Indian territory were not those who could properly be called indigenous. Long ago there were a few Hindu dynasties which, after subduing the rulers of minor kingdoms, held sway over a considerable part of the area from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin. These were Mohamedan rulers and were practically new arrivals from the northwest beyond the Indus River.

But in India a national spirit is being developed, and a great nation is in the making. Perhaps it might be said that a great nation has begun to be. This is largely the result of the marvelous recent contact of India with the West. Every lesson in the English language and in English literature has unconsciously been a preparation for a national life. Every lesson in English history has shown how a nation was developed in Great Britain and was unified and strengthened, and how national life grew in Britain's colonies and in the United States. Reading the current newspapers, magazines and books which inundate the country by the weekly foreign mail quickens the impulse awakened by the increasing knowledge of national life in various lands. The telegrams from the whole world which appear in thousands of Indian newspapers and magazines, and especially the recent experiences

of Japan are fruitful in awakening a new sense of potential political power and have quickened a desire to see India occupy a larger place in the life of the world.

There are said to be one hundred and fifty various languages and dialects, of which at least seventeen are spoken by many millions. Some are of Dravidian, some of Aryan origin, and at least one is of Semitic origin, and few who speak one home language understand and can use other languages. The one principal exception is Hindustani or Urdu, which is the home language of sixty-two million Mohamedans who form one-fifth of the population, and who are scattered throughout the whole territory. Yet while mingling with the remaining two hundred and ninety millions of India proper, there is a marked cleavage between the Mohamedans and the rest of the people and a very great majority of those who speak other languages do not use or understand this lingua franca of the Mohamedans. But with the growing knowledge and use of the English language there has sprung up a most powerful unifying and nationalizing force. English is the only language which all the best educated leaders in all parts of India can understand and use in communicating with one another and in all gatherings of representatives from all quarters. It has become the home language of many, is spoken with fluency and purity by multitudes, and gives expression to India's best thinking in numerous papers, magazines and books.

The various influences above referred to have necessarily given birth to the formation of a wide-spread public opinion, and to an increasing desire in the educated classes for a larger and larger part in the administration of public affairs. There was need of an institution for the formation, the focusing and the expression of public opinion on political matters. This necessity led to the organization, twenty-six years ago, of what is called the Indian National Congress. At first it was a loosely formed organization. Without nomination, appointment or election, representative leaders annually got together in a convention and put forth a pronouncement. For the most part they were Hindus, but a few Mohamedans, Parsis and Indian Christians have always been

among these leaders. A few sympathetic Englishmen have always encouraged and heartily coöperated in this movement. But, doubting what such a congress might grow to, many official and non-official Englishmen have been critical or hesitant.

The last days of the year from about Christmas to New Year's are a time when colleges, courts, and many business men take a brief holiday. These days are a convenient, and are climatically an advantageous, time for conventions. So the Indian National Congress always holds its annual session during these holidays. Latterly, a constitution has been adopted, in accordance with which the Congress movement is carried on. Every year a standing Executive Committee is appointed to arrange for the next meeting and to look after matters in the interval. Usually on an invitation from some large city it is voted to hold the next session in some particular place, and a local Reception Committee is appointed to make arrangements. In the capitol of each of six provinces there is a Provincial Congress Committee to promote the interests of the Congress during the year, and in various centers in the six provinces local Congress Committees look after local Congress interests. These provincial and local committees nominate persons to be delegates or members of the next Congress. Such nominations are often ratified in public local meetings. In advance the Provincial Committees send to the Reception Committee of the city where the Congress is to be held, nominations for the president of that Congress, and the Reception Committee choose one person to be presented to the Congress to preside. This selection is practically equivalent to an election, through nominally at the first session of the Congress the Reception Committee make a nomination which is voted on by a show of hands. In advance this president prepares an address which considerably molds the sentiment and action of that Congress. Also at the first session a Subjects or Business Committee is appointed, consisting of representatives from all the provinces and sections of the community. This committee decides what subjects shall be presented, frames the resolutions on these subjects, and selects the persons who are

to propose, to second and to support the resolutions. By the rules any subject which is known or supposed to be opposed by one-third of the delegates is barred from presentation or consideration. Practically, the Subjects Committee is the Congress so far as anything is said or done. In the meetings of the Congress practically there is no discussion or opportunity for divergence of opinion or opposition to what is proposed by the Subjects Committee. Yet all the resolutions go out in the name of the Indian National Congress representing the whole country.

The kind of subjects ordinarily considered are those connected with political, economical and judicial matters, such as demands for a larger admission of Indians into the Government services, economy of administration in various departments, restriction of military expenses, larger expenditure for education and irrigation, opium and temperance policies, the separation of executive and judicial functions, the partition of Bengal, the treatment of Indians in South Africa, etc. The object of most of the resolutions has been to influence sentiment in Great Britain, even more than the expectation of securing much practical attention from the British administration in India itself. It is impossible to say how much the meetings and resolutions of this Congress have effected in twenty-six years. But some of the policies and acts of Government have been modified during the interval. Part of this would probably have been effected without the influence of the Congress. Probably some of them have been hastened by the deliverances of the Congress.

Despite the apparent outward unity in all the deliverances of the Congress there has been a growing cleavage of sentiment and aim between the radical and conservative sections in the community. This cleavage recently came to a clash and a rupture in the Congress movement itself. The Moderate party has as its goal only the desire for a larger measure of home rule like that in Canada and Australia, together with loyal connection with British supremacy in a world empire. The Extremists would omit the last half of the twofold program of the Moderates, though without openly advocating any early separation from British connection.

At the meeting of the Congress in Surat in December, 1907, these two parties clashed with violent antagonism. Blows were exchanged and the Congress meeting was broken up at its opening. The Moderates were greatly in the majority and immediately held a separate session when a committee was appointed to draft a constitution and to take measures for carrying on the Congress on the lines of the Moderate policy. That constitution requires all its members explicitly to accept as their aim the development of an Indian nation as a component part of the British Empire. This excludes the Extremst party, and by that fact in a measure lessens the legitimacy of the claim that this Congress is fully a national institution. Only to a small extent have the Mohamedans sympathized with this movement, and latterly some of the Mohamedan sympathizers have drawn away. This is because in the recent very liberal enlargement of local and representative self-government given to India by Lord Morley, the Secretary of State for India in the Liberal Government of Great Britain, and by Lord Minto, the Viceroy, the principle of sectional representation has been demanded mainly by the Mohamedans and has been granted. In consequence the great desire and effort of the Mohamedans is not as broad as the national aim of the Indian National Congress, but for greater power and influence for Mohamedans. This again materially lessens the legitimacy of the claim that the Indian National Congress represents India as a whole. Exactly, it is the organ of only a fair portion of the better educated sections of the Hindu community and a small portion of the Mohamedan and Parsi and Indian Christian communities.

Because the British paramountcy is to be assumed and maintained, no Indian National Congress can become any thing like the British Parliament or American Congress, since under present circumstances there can never be one political party which can turn another party out of power and assume responsibility for administration. It is for the leaders of the Indian National Congress to show whether their institution can more and more become a true and wise National Institution.